

As Us Anything – October 24, 2020

NOTE: Answers are summaries of the responses given at the AGM and are not a transcript of the actual responses.

Question 1a: *“Striving for input from BIPOC individuals is fine, but without representation on the board/creative team how do you expect to achieve true inclusivity?”*

Question 1b: *“Love the emphasis on diversity in the constitution, but the Board nominees are all white, cis, and predominantly men. Any plans to diversity leadership?”*

Question 1c: *“I’m sad the board nominated 5 white people, 4 cis men and is all visibly white! Was there strategy around better recruiting?” – Dane*

Question 1d: *“What is the future outreach strategy to recruit BIPOC board members & leaders?” – Dane*

ANSWER:

Board: There are three interrelated issues being brought up by the above four questions:

1. That there is not enough BIPOC and LGBTQ representation on the Players Board and production teams.
2. That the 2020 nominees do not address this issue.
3. Questions about what the Board has done and plans to do to correct this.

Here are the Board’s responses to these issues:

1. The Board shares the opinion that there is not enough BIPOC and LGBTQ representation on the Players Board and production teams. The Board believes that a better balance is needed at all levels of Players (Executive,

Board, Members, and Audience) and that this is where efforts should be focused for the time being.

The Board urges the membership to keep in mind that there are very few people currently involved (or historically involved) in Players who identify as either or both BIPOC and LGBTQ. Thus, we have very few people to draw upon at this time. And we also don't want to participate in tokenism wherein someone is made to feel that their participation on the Board / Exec / Production team is more about us using their identity than actually wanting them to be fully and equally involved.

Furthermore, on the question of gender split, the Board wishes to point out that at least one female identifying nominee turned down their nomination, as is their right, which highlights the fact that nominees can't (and shouldn't) be forced to take on the responsibility of being on the Board if they do not want it.

Given the above, it is the opinion of the Board that we should be undertaking a genuine and long-term effort to diversify our writers / production team / cast / band and that by doing so we will diversify our overall membership. This should then lead to more diversity in our audience, which in turn will lead to more diversity the following year when we begin recruiting again.

The hope is that a more diverse membership will organically lead to a more diverse slate of nominees in future years.

2. The Board shares the opinion that the 2020 nominees do not address this issue. It should be noted that several people at the AGM made it clear that the nominees were all very much deserving candidates who each have the full trust of the membership. So, when we say that the nominees do not address the issue, we're specifically referring to their own personal BIPOC

status. As noted above, we hope that our upcoming changes to recruitment will overtime result in a natural and meaningful progression towards a better balance.

3. As stated, the Board intends to address this through revised recruitment efforts and changes to how we write and cast shows, and how we choose production teams and bands. That's to say the Board is focused on diversifying the membership as a whole.

The Board wishes to clarify that the Board does not recruit or nominate members to run for the Board – this is to avoid any appearance of a conflict of interest. Put another way, the Board should not choose its own replacements – the membership should – and thus the Board should not be actively recruiting or grooming specific nominees. We must rely on the membership to nominate (either by self-nominating or nominating someone else) the best possible nominees, and then for the same membership to choose who will join (or remain on) the Board.

Otherwise, the Board runs the risk of being seen as an inner circle choosing their own replacements when in fact, we should be representing the will of the membership at large.

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Question 2: *“Will the 2020 show (show idea, script, production team etc.) be used when we can safely go forward, or will script submission/role application start again?”*

ANSWER:

Board: The changes that are proposed for how we write and staff shows will necessitate a fresh start. And as funny as the script was, we must acknowledge that “Legally Bond” screams that this is a super white show... which is not what we want going forward.

Question 3a: *“Any early ideas on Covid-friendly shows? (Virtual or otherwise) Or is the idea to wait until it is safe(r) to do so?”*

Question 3b: *“Might Players launch some virtual programming in some capacity? Would be great for people across the country (like me 😊) to remain involved.”*

ANSWER:

Board: The Artistic Director has determined that digital/virtual shows will not suit the Players brand artistically and the Board agrees. As such we do not plan to stage digital shows other than releasing a few videos of previous productions and our live read of AvengerDale.

Put another way, we don't feel that a Players show without a live audience really is a Players show we want to stage. We'd rather wait until conditions allow us to stage a show more in line with previous live productions.

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Question 4: *“While blind casting is one approach, how committed is Players to balancing writing/production/BOD for more diverse & inclusive perspectives at all stages?”*

ANSWER:

Board: The Board would like to clarify that Players has for a number of years operated under an explicit policy to NOT utilize “colour blind casting” since this method has a history of further excluding BIPOC performers and minimizing issues of race. Rather, for the last number of years we have been adamant that characters that are based on a BIPOC performance should ONLY be played by BIPOC performers. Conversely, characters that are based on non-BIPOC performances can be played by any performer in a Players show.

It should also be noted that Players has not always operated in this way, and that there have been many instances in our earlier shows where characters that were based on a BIPOC performance were played on the Players stage by non-BIPOC performers. Players deeply regrets this past practice and commits to acknowledge it, and to never undertake it again.

The Board and Artistic Director are deeply committed to elevating all aspects of how we go about choosing the properties involved in shows, and the people who make up our cast/crew and band to further emphasis Diversity, Equity and Inclusion.

We also recognize this will not be the sort of change that happens over night, but rather a gradual shift in the makeup of our membership based on meaningful and genuine efforts to affect change.

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Question 5: *"I would like to hear more about how scripts were chosen this year and if that format will continue."*

ANSWER:

Board: This past year the Artistic Director formed a writer's room based on submitted material and tasked that room to collectively develop a script idea and then flesh it out into a full script. We have had good feedback on both the process and the result. Going forward a similar approach is likely to be used, but with adjusted direction as to the nature of which properties to try to use, and the inclusiveness of the writer's room to begin with.

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Question 6: *"What plan is in place to respond to accessibility needs of Players/audience members? ASL, captioning, physical space, translation/interpretation services?"*

ANSWER:

Board: Thankfully, the vast majority of our shows (27/35) have taken place in fully physically accessible venues, such as the Tranzac, Steam Whistle Brewery, The John Candy Box Theatre, The Great Hall, The Theatre Centre, and Little Montreal. Regrettably, some of our shows have been staged in venues that are not fully accessible such as the Social Capital, The Drake Hotel and the Gordon Best Theatre. We will continue researching other venue options, with a keen eye kept on physical accessibility and make it a priority to book accessible venues.

Discussions related to the main stage show, and staging 1 performance out of 6 with an ASL interpreter have taken place, but until there is a show to stage, there's only so much we can plan in this regard. With regard to captioning, we will explore what is available in the marketplace. With regard to translation/interpretation services, we do not anticipate making accommodations in those areas.

Please keep in mind that Players operates on a shoestring budget, has seen our rent more than quadruple over the past 3 years, and we have unfortunately lost the majority of our financial sponsors. We will do whatever we can to creatively address the accessible needs of others, but please know that there will likely be a limit to how far we can go based on the funds available.

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Question 7: *"Would Players consider hosting some sort of learning event related to BIPOC and LGBT sensitivity?"*

ANSWER:

Board: Yes. Shortly after forming our next Board, we will be participating in a BIPOC and LGBTQ sensitivity course for which we will be paying an expert in the field to educate us. Part of the agreement is that we will be able to make the recording of this session available to all Players members!